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SUBJECT: ROMA PLENIPOTENTIARY RESIGNS

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¶1. Summary: Anina Botosova, the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs, announced her resignation on June 10. The day before her resignation, Botosova was accused of allocating 22,000 euros to an NGO which she formerly headed, and was criticized for posthumously honoring her father, the late Jan Berky Mrenica, a famous violinist, with a prize for humanity in December 2008. Botosova has told us for months now that she was contemplating resignation. This latest criticism, coupled with her perception that her superior, Deputy Prime Minister Caplovic, no longer listens to her, apparently pushed her to finally do it. End summary.

Background on Botosova and the Plenipotentiary Pitfalls

¶2. Anina Botosova was appointed by the Fico administration in June 2007 to succeed Klara Orgavanova as the Roma Plenipotentiary. Prior to her appointment, Botosova worked as an advisor to the Minister of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family. Botosova was supposedly selected because PM Fico admired her father, Jan Berky Mrenica, a famous violinist. Botosova herself was seen by NGOs (both Roma and non-Roma) as ineffectual, disorganized, and passive (especially in contrast to Orgovanova, who has her own share of enemies but was viewed as extremely competent.) We had not heard any previous allegations of corruption in her office.

¶3. The Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights, Minorities, and Knowledge-Based Society, Dusan Caplovic, oversees the Roma Plenipotentiary's Office, and recently restructured the office without Botosova's consent or input (reftel). Caplovic's spokeswoman, Erika Adamova, is herself a Roma and is the daughter of Gejza Adam, the Director of a Kosice Art School for Roma children, and a sometime political activist looking to establish a Roma Coalition Party. According to Botosova's assistant Ivan Hriczko, Botosova had long felt that Adamova and Adam have Caplovic's ear on all things Roma, and that her advice was no longer valued.

The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back

¶4. On June 9, Frantisek Tanko, the founder of the Roma Union NGO, called for Botosova's resignation because she assigned two grants for a total of 22,000 euros to the NGO Kaleidoskop for cultural activities. Botosova publicly stated that she ended her association with Kaleidoskop over five years ago when she began working in the government, and that she never voted on projects on which Kaleidoskop bid. Tanko also criticized Botosova's honoring of her own father with a posthumous prize for humanity, to which she replied that her father had been honored by many other organizations for his art, and she had also abstained from voting on this prize.

¶5. On June 10, Botosova announced her resignation, saying that she disapproved of DPM Caplovic's approach and that of the government to Roma problems, and resented the constant attacks against her. She also lamented Caplovic's stonewalling, saying "if he appointed me....then it's absolutely impertinent that he didn't find me worth devoting five minutes to for a conversation." DPM Caplovic announced that he would mount an official investigation of the Kaleidoskop grants.

¶6. Iaco Oravec of the Milan Simecka Foundation told us that the NGOs that work on Roma issues fear the influence of Adam and Adamova. Adamova is reportedly now sitting in the plenipotentiary's office, because she is someone Caplovic can trust. In a recent meeting, Adamova was able to tell us little about Slovakia's plans for its Presidency of the Decade for Roma Inclusion, but did confide that she does not understand why NGOs are concerned about her efforts to secure government funding for her father's school. The appearance of nepotism did not seem to bother her.

COMMENT

¶7. While we never found Botosova particularly effective, the government's -- including DPM Caplovic's -- commitment to Roma issues has also been suspect. Part of the problem appears to be the lack of clarity surrounding the Plenipotentiary's job: whether the Plenipotentiary's office is supposed to serve as the voice of the government to the Roma, the voice of the Roma to the government, or somehow to

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perform both roles simultaneously is a question few seem able to answer. So far as we can tell, none of the approximately 200 million Euros available in "horizontal priority" funds for Roma project has been spent. Botosova's successor will have a full plate, as the Slovak Presidency of the Decade for Roma Inclusion begins next month with the office clearly in disarray.
EDDINS